

# SOUTH END

## EXISTING LAND USE

The South End sector is the primary gateway to Blacksburg. Visitors enter on Main Street from either Route 460 Business or Bypass. To the west lies a quiet residential neighborhood adjacent to Montgomery Regional Hospital surrounded by open space, mature landscaping, and close to the Huckleberry Trail and the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center. The eastern portion of this sector includes the Blacksburg Industrial Park and the South Main Street commercial/office area. Residential uses are concentrated in the northeastern portion of the sector, and along Ramble Road, Farmview Drive, Ellett Road, and Jennelle Road.

### *Unique Characteristics*

***This is the major gateway or "front door" of Blacksburg.*** The South End planning sector is at the far southern end of Main Street where the Route 460 Bypass splits off from Business Route 460. The Route 460 Blacksburg Interchange is under construction and scheduled for completion in 2002. This new interchange will tie the Route 460 Bypass, Route 460 Business, and Smart Road (Direct Link) projects together. Most Blacksburg visitors approach the town from Route 460 and this gateway is their first impression of Blacksburg. New construction in the Industrial Park is highly visible from the new highways and should be developed as attractively landscaped research/development or light industry facilities in a campus-like setting.

***On approaching Blacksburg from the south, Main Street presents a wide entrance corridor with attractive landscaping.*** This is the result of an extensive landscaping and beautification program initiated by citizens of Blacksburg. The South Main Landscape Committee still works to maintain the attractiveness of this area. Future upgrades are also planned for the area including the addition of landscaped medians, attractive signage, off-road trails, and bike lanes.

***Office and industrial parks are a strong presence in this sector.*** The Blacksburg Industrial Park, in the southeastern portion of the sector, stretches almost 160 acres. The park has 20 businesses that employ approximately 2,068 people<sup>1</sup>. Included in this employment total are the Blacksburg Transit facilities and the town's Public Works department. To the northwest, adjacent to the Virginia Tech airport, is

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<sup>1</sup> Blacksburg Town Manager's Office, November 2000.

the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center. This 120-acre campus style research park provides a supportive environment for high-technology companies and opportunities to collaborate with faculty and research specialists at Virginia Tech. Thirteen buildings are complete consisting of over 400,000 gross square feet, three will be operational in 2002, and thirteen future buildings are planned for a total of one million square feet of space. Over 110 tenants, consisting of private companies and various other research-oriented facilities, employ over 1,775 people.<sup>2</sup>

***Residential areas are primarily in the northern portion of the sector, and west of the Route 460 Bypass.*** Residential neighborhoods consist of multifamily developments in the Nellie's Cave Park area, townhouses along Ramble Road intermingled with office uses, open space, and single-family homes. The residential areas of Farmview, Layman Court, and Myer's Acres are west of the Route 460 Bypass. The retirement village of Warm Hearth lies just across the town boundary.

***This sector includes Montgomery Regional Hospital and is adjacent to Warm Hearth Village.*** Proximity to the hospital and associated medical offices is an asset to those families living in the South End. The hospital and its associated medical uses should be retained and enhanced. Warm Hearth is a good neighbor in the area with its tree covered, quiet village setting that provides a variety of retirement living options.

***There are still large parcels of undeveloped land.*** These expanses of green space provide a feeling of openness and a rural character for the sector. Wildlife takes sanctuary in the wooded ravines and steep slopes characteristic of this sector. Future parks need to be planned for the area and limited public open space exists throughout the main corridor.

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<sup>2</sup> Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center, Inc., 2001. Dr. Joe W. Meredith, President.

## ***Critical Issues***

***A Route 460 Blacksburg Interchange will be complete in 2002 by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT).*** This new interchange and its appearance are important to the town, especially for those who live in this sector. The interchange is below grade as much as is feasible for the area, and is as unobtrusive on the surrounding views as possible. Attractive landscaping, green space, litter control, and pedestrian access through the area are essential to softening the project's aesthetics at the town's main entrance. Businesses and homes not directly taken by the highway right-of-way, are primarily concerned with continued access and maintaining scenic views. The construction of this new interchange will create about 36 acres of developable land once VDOT abandons the old interchange. This land is well suited for attractive, high-end commercial use.

***Preservation of open space and protection of wildlife habitat are concerns of the community.*** As the Corporate Research Center expands, and with additional access and visibility of the area from the new interchange, residents emphasize the preservation of green space. Deer, bird species, and other wildlife take refuge in many of the ravines and hollows throughout the sector. This valuable open space should be preserved to improve and protect the environmental integrity of the area.

***There is a lack of public parks and recreational facilities in the sector.*** The majority of the undeveloped land in this sector is privately held. In addition the closest park to the area residents is Nellie's Cave Park located on the northeastern border of the sector. Acquisition of land to develop a neighborhood or community park in the southern end of the sector, as well as expanding the land and facilities at Nellie's Cave Park is important to meet the recreational needs of this sector.

***Pedestrian travel through the area is difficult and the pedestrian system is fragmented or absent in key areas.*** Although the main residential areas are a short distance from either the Huckleberry Trail or Nellie's Cave Park, the necessary sidewalk and bike lanes are not in place for pedestrians to safely access these facilities. Sidewalk recently installed along Grissom Lane will improve the deficiency for area residents, but the Farmview/Ramble community lacks this basic infrastructure. In addition the Corporate Research Center has an extensive trail system and bike lanes, but access to these facilities from residential areas within the sector is limited. The industrial park currently has no trail, lane, or other pedestrian facilities, but preliminary plans to add trails and sidewalks to the park are being

discussed. These amenities will encourage more pedestrian travel and improve the working environment within the park. The South Main Greenway is a Corridor Committee priority that will connect the industrial park with Ellett Road. Connecting the existing trail systems to residential, commercial, and industrial areas with sidewalks and bicycle paths and lanes will substantially improve pedestrian safety and access throughout this sector.

***Virginia Tech's Corporate Research Center (CRC) will continue to expand.*** This research park has exceeded development expectations and provides healthy employment and business expansion for Blacksburg. As the center expands, retention of its high quality, campus-like development is important to the surrounding neighborhoods. The town needs to anticipate impacts on transit, traffic congestion, utilities, and external effects on adjacent land uses. Community members have expressed concern about the future of residential uses along Ramble Road, although they are generally in favor of the expansion of the CRC.

***Public sewer is not currently available to several properties in the Industrial Park and surrounding properties.*** Sewer will be necessary to develop these properties with light industrial or research and development types of uses. Private property owners have also expressed interest in the extension of sewerage services to this area.

***Improve fire and rescue response times in this part of town.*** The high value industrial and office property in this sector, and its distance from the downtown or Prices Fork fire and rescue stations, warrants the location of a new station closer to, or within, this Sector. Response times to the sector are greater than to most areas in Town, which is an increasing concern as airport facilities, commercial, research, and industrial uses are expanded. The residents of Warm Hearth Village are also concerned about this issue and support other area residents in encouraging a Fire/Rescue Station in the southern end of Town.

***Public transportation should expand to better serve South End residents.*** Since the sector is home to a hospital, the Blacksburg Transit System, the Corporate Research Center, the industrial park, and directly adjacent to a major retirement village, transit service should be expanded to serve the residential areas of the sector as well. Residents highly value this public service, but do not have routine, convenient access.

***Provide vegetative buffers and limit the heights of commercial/office uses to reduce the visual impact on the surrounding area and view sheds.*** This sector is increasingly attractive to office and commercial uses. Limiting the heights of buildings around the Route 460

Blacksburg Interchange will minimize their visual obstruction reinforcing the character of the area, and Blacksburg's primary gateway. A well-planned and landscaped entrance that compliments the area's economic and aesthetic attributes will bring appropriate businesses into the area and further enhance this major entrance into Town.

***Improve road access and quality in the southwestern portion of the sector.*** Access into the southern portion of the sector from the rest of Town is currently limited to Route 460 Business, creating several transportation and safety issues. Constructing a new road connecting the Warm Hearth area to Hethwood will alleviate many safety and traffic concerns by providing a secondary access to the area. In addition, improving Hightop Road, Farmview Drive, and Mabry Lane with wider shoulders, bike lanes, and sidewalk and expanding Ellett Road to four lanes, with bike lanes and sidewalk, will greatly improve safety and access issues in the sector.

## ***Neighborhoods***

The South End Sector is a diverse area filled with a variety of land uses. There are currently two neighborhood planning areas in this sector. These neighborhoods vary greatly in housing style, owner vs. renter occupancy, and land use.

### **Ellett - Jennelle**

The Ellett - Jennelle\_neighborhood is located on the eastern side of Route 460 Business. This neighborhood planning area incorporates the Blacksburg Industrial Park and several commercial areas along South Main Street. Residential areas are primarily along Ellett Road, north of the industrial park, although there are houses along Jennelle Road south of the park. These residential areas have a range of housing from low to high density residential. Several large apartment complexes and townhouses are located in the Ellett Road/Fairfax Road area providing affordable housing to student and non-student residents. The street system for the northern residential area consists of several winding local roads that connect with apartment parking lots and single-family houses. The sidewalk system in this neighborhood is largely intact, and local sidewalks join with the Ellett Road sidewalk linking pedestrians to the main road in the area with access to other parts of Town.

The industrial park is based on a grid system that uses Industrial Park Drive and Professional Park Drive as the primary arteries. The completion of the Blacksburg interchange will tie Industrial Park Drive directly into Route 460 and the Smart Road. Several industries located in the park are high-tech and are attracted to the region

because of the university and town's emphasis on research and development.

### *Critical Neighborhood Issues*

- ◆ The residential neighborhood is primarily reliant on Ellett Road to connect with the rest of Town. The physical condition and traffic volume of this road is critical to area residents. As traffic congestion increases, Ellett Road will have to be expanded to accommodate the additional traffic.
- ◆ The residential and industrial portions of this neighborhood directly abut each other without a transitional zone. Acquiring property along the northern boundary of the industrial park to increase the buffer area would provide permanent, public green space that provides an additional transitional buffer between these vastly different areas.
- ◆ Development outside of Town limits affects this neighborhood. Several housing projects on the Montgomery County – Town border have increased traffic on local and collector roads. Traffic is a concern townwide and ensuring that developments outside of Town are of a scale and design to minimize traffic congestion and speeding on roads is critical.
- ◆ Increases in Virginia Tech enrollment affect the conversion rate of properties from owner-occupied to rental housing. This neighborhood has seen a rise in the number of rental houses in recent years. In addition, many portions of this neighborhood are transitional residential and not included under the Rental Permitting Program. Minimizing the negative effects of off-campus student housing in low and transitional residential areas through rental permitting, code enforcement, and increasing landlord awareness of code and nuisance related issues is a major goal.

### **Farmview / Ramble**

This neighborhood is bound by South Main Street to the east, the town's corporate limits to the west and south, and Virginia Tech to the north. The neighborhood has a large single-family residential area west of the 460 Bypass, a hospital and commercial area south of the Route 460 Blacksburg Interchange, and a diverse mix of office, research, multifamily, and single family uses along Ramble Road. This neighborhood is heavily influence by development in the Corporate Research Center. Large tracts of land remain undeveloped in this area. The topography is largely defined by rolling hills and ravines. Some areas unsuitable for development are important habitats for wildlife. The Huckleberry Trail runs through this neighborhood providing a

valuable recreation and transportation amenity. This neighborhood is also near the historic Merrimac coal mining facility. Warm Hearth Village is located directly adjacent to the neighborhood in the county. The continued development, changes, and needs of this retirement community is a concern to area residents. Most residents see Warm Hearth as an asset to the area that provides a valuable service and want to see it prosper and grow in a well planned, safe manner.

### *Critical Neighborhood Issues*

- ◆ Traffic is an increasing concern for this neighborhood, especially in the Hightop Road and Farmview Drive area. These roads are currently designed for rural traffic use with less intense travel. As the area has developed it has placed increasing pressure on this road system creating some safety issues. Upgrading these roads with wider shoulders, bike lanes, and sidewalks will allow for traffic to be more safely accommodated.
- ◆ The 36 acres of land that VDOT will vacate once construction of the Route 460 Blacksburg Interchange is complete lies within this neighborhood. Part of this area should be utilized as a public park for the neighborhood with trail connections as appropriate. The town should consider the height and placement of future development on the remaining land to limit impacts on the view shed. Traffic from these developments should not use local roads for their primary access.
- ◆ Although the Huckleberry Trail runs through this neighborhood, access to the trail is limited. Sidewalks and bicycle lanes are needed to provide residents safe and convenient access to the trail. Farmview Drive and Hightop Road are important pedestrian links that also need to be improved with sidewalk and bike lanes.

## **VISION**

The town's "front door" provides a sophisticated, attractive first impression of Blacksburg. The concentration of well-landscaped green space is prominent upon approaching Town from the Smart Road/Route 460 Bypass Bypass. The area also boasts well-planned parks for light industry, research, technology, and professional offices. These businesses reinforce the high quality landscaping by placing a strong emphasis on appearance. Near Virginia Tech's Corporate Research Center, transitional residential areas provide short-term housing for visiting research specialists and scientists.

West of the Route 460 Bypass, there are dedicated open space areas with single-family homes along with research and professional office uses interspersed among the woodlands and pastures. A good

sidewalk, bicycle, and trail system links pedestrians and bicyclists to the rest of Town. The transportation network is multi-modal, well maintained, and safely accommodates vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Growth is gradual and controlled, reducing impacts on the natural and social environment.

### ***Special Considerations***

- ◆ A fire and rescue facility in or near the South End sector is needed. Locations may include airport land, the Corporate Research Center, or other currently vacant properties.
- ◆ A portion of the 36 acres that the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) will vacate should be utilized as high-end commercial development for a hotel/conference center or professional office space that supports either the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center (CRC) or Montgomery Regional Hospital. The remainder of the site should be utilized as a park with connections to the Huckleberry Trail and CRC trail system. Development should be sensitive to height and placement of structures and use appropriate screening and buffering to reduce the visual impact on the surrounding area and to provide an open, well-maintained appearance.
- ◆ A 40-acre nature park could be established to protect the area of ravines and poor soils west of the Route 460 Bypass. A park with hiking trails, wildflower trails, and picnic areas would have good pedestrian access from the extended Huckleberry Trail to the west, and vehicular access from Farmview Drive to the east.
- ◆ The east side of South Main Street, designated as office and commercial, development should be sensitive to the character of the area, attractive, and heavily landscaped especially along the road frontage. Strip development is not desired.
- ◆ Appropriate signage and displays should be installed along the Huckleberry Trail and nearby parks to recognize the coal-mining heritage of this part of Town.
- ◆ Places of worship are shown on the future land use map in their 2001 locations, because they are important anchors in a neighborhood and should be retained. They are an appropriate use in most neighborhoods when developed at a scale consistent with the surrounding community, as allowed by special use permit. The town does not wish to limit future locations of places of worship to the indicated map areas.

### ***Changes From Existing Land Use Map***

- The Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center and the Blacksburg Industrial Park will both develop to their full capacity. The industrial park will not expand beyond its present boundaries, unless land becomes available across the town line in Montgomery County.
- The vacated 36 acres of land near the Route 460 Blacksburg Interchange is designated as Professional Office for the development of a hotel/conference center with appropriately designed open space and trail connections.
- The portions of land along Hightop Road that were incorporated into the town with the boundary adjustment will develop as Professional Office to support the medical needs of Montgomery Regional Hospital.
- The portions of land along South Main Street which were incorporated into the town with the boundary adjustment will develop as Commercial or Professional Office, and will maintain any significant open space critical to the area's view shed.
- The portions of land along Yellow Sulphur Road and Jennelle Road which were incorporated into the town with the boundary adjustment will develop as Industrial or Professional Office, and will maintain the campus-like standard already present in the Blacksburg Industrial Park.
- Professional Office or Commercial uses along South Main Street from the new interchange to Ellett Road will utilize creative designs, minimize the impact to adjacent open spaces, preserve additional significant green space, and maintain the area's unique view shed.
- The area along Ramble Road, near the Corporate Research Center, may accommodate high density residential or professional office uses as the road infrastructure and public transit service allows. Multifamily residential units and office buildings should be appropriately screened and attractively constructed to preserve the view shed along the South Main Street corridor.